EDITORIAL

Losing it?

As an undergraduate in the 1970s at a large American state university I imbibed the four-field approach to anthropology with its broad agenda of integrating all things behavioural and biological when studying human variability. That agenda still resonates in my research, though I suspect that to the post-modernist generation weaned on Foucault, Derrida and Buffy, the Enlightenment ideals of thirty years ago seem distant and naively optimistic. The atomisation of anthropology continues apace, but just occasionally a reminder emerges of the power of a unified vision that resonates for archaeologists and anthropologists alike. The 'retirement' of Richard B Lee at the age of 70 is just such an event.

The papers in this issue, and that of Megan Biesele's in the previous issue, originate from a joint conference of the Canadian Anthropological Society (CASCA) and the American Ethnological Society (AES) held in honour of Lee's enormous contribution to hunter-gatherer research. (My thanks to Kirk Endicott and Bob Hitchcock for bringing these papers to *Before Farming*.) Among archaeologists, Lee is best known for his analysis of Ju/'hoansi (!Kung) subsistence behaviour, focusing on the energetics of hunting and gathering. His measuring of the caloric input and output of various subsistence activities lies at the foundation of foraging theory, which has since developed into an analytical tool for modelling prehistoric and contemporary hunter-gatherer decision-making. Lee's contribution to the *Man the Hunter* (1968) volume has had a lasting impact on hunter-gatherer anthropology and archaeology and is still in print forty years later. Reflecting on his career, Lee comments in this issue that it was the Palaeolithic archaeologist Desmond Clark who encouraged him to do his doctoral research among the Bushmen of northern Botswana – perhaps this fruitful guidance that transcended fields of specialisation was also legacy of the four-field approach. Though best known for his long association with the Ju/'hoan, Lee draws our attention to his more recent engagement with hunter-gatherer communities in Labrador and British Columbia. As an activist in land rights and related issues, Lee calls for the direct involvement of ethnographers with those they work with, helping to find solutions to contemporary problems created by life in the modern State and the erosive impact of western capitalism on traditional values.

The moral positioning of anthropologists lies at the heart of the contributions here, as does continuity in hunter-gatherer beliefs and practices in the face of external influences. Easton in his personal and outspoken contribution draws attention to the persistence among the Subarctic Dineh of a sharing ethos, a continuing reliance on plant and animal foods and a strongly held belief in human-animal interdependence. Beneath the superficial material changes remain core social, economic and spiritual values that are enabling them to cope with the challenges of schooling and institutionalised racism and retain Dineh communal identities.

In the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, a much less reassuring picture emerges for the hunter-gatherer communities returning after the landmark ruling in 2006 by the High Court of Botswana granting limited legal access to land, water, and State support of schooling and health care. Hitchcock and Babchuk review the protracted history of hunter-gatherer land rights in southern Africa with a focus on the Central Kalahari (see also Suzman 2004 and Saugestad 2006 in *Before Farming*). By the end of 2007 only 70 individuals had returned to live in the Reserve and the authors ask if they really have a future under the restrictions imposed on their lifestyles. Traditional responses to scarcity such as mobility, extended alliance networks and maintenance of ancestral land-rights are all being challenged under the current legal restrictions. The age and gender structure of these returnees also warrants close consideration: will there be the necessary balance of experience and youth to make the transition successful? Older generations may have the knowledge needed to cope under these restricted conditions, but lack the physical endurance or strength to be effective hunters and gatherers. Involvement of a younger generation is also essential for the transmission and maintenance of subsistence strategies. We will continue to report on the changing situation in the Central Kalahari.

Guenther in his commentary on Hitchcock and Babchuk brings a slightly more positive perspective, observing that though the economic lives of the Bushmen as observed by Marshall, Lee and others has altered significantly since the 1950s there remains continuity in expressive culture – namely in traditions of story telling, music making and trance dancing. Biesele's work in recording Ju/'hoan folklore, in particular the connection between hunting and storytelling, is well known and raises the concern that as hunting declines so will this dimension of social life. Such a tradition of storytelling is likely to be as central to the success of the re-settlement of the Central Kalahari as is having an age and gender balance. The commercialisation of the trance dance in the context of tourism in the Kalahari also raises concern that a once communal activity now has a monetary value that will distort the long-held sharing ethos. Despite these negative trends, Guenther concludes that trance dancing and storytelling still retain their roles as integrative, identity enhancing activities. As with the Dineh, identifiably hunter-gatherer behaviours – economic and social – remain among the Bushmen, but for how long?

The Editor
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